

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

(SUI's translation workshop only one of its kind)

IOWA CITY, IOWA, May 20 -- The young Mexican student was enthusiastic about the American writers he had read in translation--he knew of Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, as well as the writers of his native country.

The visiting specialist in American literature--a novelist and professor at The State University of Iowa--found plenty of knowledge and enthusiasm about U.S. authors during his State Department-sponsored tour of South and Central America.

But when the young Mexican asked him, in turn, "...and what do you think of our writers--Juan Rulfo, Juan Jose Arreola, Octavio Paz?" the visitor had to admit that he had not read any of them because their work had not been translated into English, and was largely unknown in this country.

As a result of this and similar experiences, Vance Bourjaily, who was the visitor, returned to Iowa City with a feeling that something ought to be done about the language barrier in literature. He got together with his colleagues at the SUI Writers Workshop, and members of other departments in the University to exchange ideas.

Paul Engle, director of the SUI program in creative writing, had himself recently returned from a trip to Asia, and he agreed with Bourjaily about the general lack of knowledge in this country of foreign writers.

Professor John Gerber, chairman of the Department of English, and Professor Ralph Freedman, chairman of the program in Comparative Literature, helped work out details, and a translation workshop was established as a regular offering for the 1963 spring semester, under the dual designation of English 8:174 and Comparative Literature 48:220.

Engle already had a long-standing interest in translation, having translated the German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, into English. Other persons at SUI had

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been engaged in translating activities for some time. W.D. Snodgrass, Theodore Holmes and Ralph Freedman, among others, were translating contemporary European poetry several years before the workshop was established. In effect, says Engle, the translation workshop merely continued and consolidated the already established tradition of creative translation on the Iowa campus.

Students from half a dozen foreign countries as well as the U.S. are attending the weekly workshop sessions, translating both prose and poetry from their native languages into English. Among the languages represented are Korean, Chinese, Bengali, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Latin, Greek, and Polish.

Unlike other translation classes, the SUI workshop is not limited to any one language or period. The emphasis is on practical application of translating techniques, and students concentrate on the language and field of their choice, often translating their own work and that of their contemporaries.

Following the tradition in the writing program that all staff members must be themselves practicing writers, the instructors in the translation workshop have been established translators in their own right. The first session was taught by Edmund Keeley, a visiting professor from Princeton University and a specialist in modern Greek and French poetry. The present instructor is Mark Strand, a poet whose verse and translations have appeared in the New Yorker, Atlantic, The Nation, Yale Review, and other leading periodicals.

Many of Strand's translations of Spanish poetry are soon to appear in the Indiana University Press "Anthology of Modern Spanish Poetry," the "Bantam Anthology of Modern European Poetry," "Selected Poems of Rafael Alberti," and "Cantico: Poems of Jorge Guillen."

A successful translation, says Strand, must be above all a convincing and imaginative reading experience in English. This often means that the translator must 're-invent' or interpret the original work, especially when the differences between languages and cultures are great, as in Chinese and English.

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Several of Strand's students are working on ambitious translation projects which may soon result in published works. Among these are Wai-Lim Yip's anthology of modern Chinese poetry, Krzysztof Zarzecki's translations of recent Polish poetry, Sunil Gangopadhyay's renderings of contemporary poetry in Bengali, the literary language of India, and Ko-Won's translations from Korean poetry.

As the translation workshop continues to grow, more foreign students are being attracted to Iowa and the special advantages of being able to work in their own language with expert assistance from the workshop staff. Next year, a classical scholar and poet from the University of Texas, Professor Frederic Will, may come to SUI to teach in the translation workshop and comparative literature program.

Engle hopes to expand the activities of the translation workshop to accommodate the increasing demand. The U.S. Department of State, he says, has expressed interest in the program, and inquiries have been received from many foreign countries. It is not unlikely, he feels, that a series of definitive translations of contemporary writers in the major languages of Europe and Asia could be produced at SUI. The benefits in terms of cultural interchange and mutual understanding could be great.

One direct result of the work being done in the translation workshop is the first International Poetry Reading, to be held on the SUI campus today (Wednesday). Poems from 14 foreign languages will be read in the original languages, along with English translations done by students in the translation workshop.

The reading will be held in Shambaugh auditorium at 4 p.m. Students and faculty are welcome to attend, as well as the general public.